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## Aiona: Hawaii should target China tourism

Lt. Governor speaks in Hilo

Stephens Media Group

Lt. Gov. James "Duke" Aiona says Hawaii has been missing out on a great tourist market in China, and that the Chinese are very interested in what they can learn from Hawaii's tourism industry.

Aiona spoke Friday at the Hilo Rotary Club meeting at the Naniloa Hotel, touching on everything from Chinese visas to the recurring topic of methamphetamine control.

Fresh from a tour of Shanghai, Beijing and other Chinese cities, Aiona said that current United States policy makes it very difficult for Chinese citizens to obtain tourist visas. The many officials he spoke made that clear: "They told us, 'You clear up this visa problem and you will get umpteen million tourists there.'"

During a recent four-day national celebration, Aiona said, "in Beijing alone they had over 110 million tourists. Those 110 million tourists spent over 1 billion in U.S. dollars in four days. So that gives you an indication of the potential of that market in China."

In order to satiate the people's desire for travel, Aiona said Chinese developers aim to "duplicate" Hawaii at the island province of Hainan. "They call it the Hawaii of China," he said, noting the area looks like Hanalei did 50 years ago.

"But they can't duplicate our culture, they can't duplicate our people, and that is what really attracted them," he said, "not only the beauty of Hawaii but the people."

Beijing and Shanghai are busy preparing for the 2008 Olympics and the 2010 World Expo, Aiona said. "They are very much in focus with upgrading all of their hotels and so it is just natural that we would be a part of it."

The University of Hawaii's Travel Industry Management school has signed a memorandum of understanding with the Chinese Nankai University, he said, laying the foundation for mutually beneficial cooperation.

Aiona added that he hopes Gov. Lingle's visit planned for next year will close a lot of the deals initiated during his visit.

Turning to a topic that has been in primary focus for the past year, the lieutenant governor spoke about the battle against "ice," particularly the fight being waged in rural areas of the Neighbor Islands. Aiona said the state needs to step up the fight against crystal methamphetamine.

He said that the counties and the federal government need state departments to "pull their fair share when it comes to law enforcement."

"Everyone knows we are getting a lot of federal assistance in law enforcement," Aiona said, referring to the \$4.5 million federal grant Hawaii recently received.

Aiona said state legislators need to modify current wire tap laws, and amend the state constitution to allow "walk and talk," a tactic used by police to screen potential drug smugglers at airports that the state Supreme Court ruled illegal. An amendment would override that ruling.

"All we wanted was an opportunity for that amendment to get on the ballot and let the voters decide," he said. "It didn't even get out of committee."

However, Aiona warned that too strong of a focus on law enforcement would only yield a temporary solution.

"As a prosecutor, as a judge, I've seen cocaine choked out, if you just focus on the supply," he said. "But it just shifts to another drug. I've seen that also. I've seen it shift from cocaine to meth."

Aiona said citizens can be sure that the administration is looking at both the long- and short-term control of not only ice but of all harmful drugs. "Believe me," he said, "we're taking a balanced approach to this one."

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